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# THE MEANING OF THE MNEMONIC FORMULÆ FOR THE RADICAL AND SERVILE LETTERS IN HEBREW.

SAADIA BEN JOSEPH, of Fayum, in Egypt (892-942), the celebrated chief (Gaon) of the Talmudical academy in Sora—since whose birth a thousand years have passed—may justly and gratefully be regarded by us as the true founder of Jewish science. In addition to his importance as a legist and Talmudic scholar, he was also versed in the philosophy of his time, and through his book *Emunoth Vedeoth*, he founded the Jewish religious philosophy of the Middle Ages. By his Arabic translation of the entire Bible and the Arabic Commentary which accompanied it, he established the science of exegesis and theology. He compiled the first Hebrew Lexicon, and wrote grammatical treatises, by which he laid the basis for the scientific investigation of the language. And even the incidental details of his work had a fruitful influence on posterity. An instructive example of this is afforded by his division of the Hebrew letters into those employed only in root-formation, and others which serve also in the construction of words and grammatical forms. Saadia, it is true, did not invent this division, but he elaborated it and helped to extend its adoption. It had already been suggested by his older contemporary, Aaron ben Asher, the well-known Massoretic and grammatical student of Tiberias, who had distinguished 12 out of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as those “that are eaten with all flesh,”<sup>1</sup> i.e., letters which must be added as formative elements to the body of the radical

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<sup>1</sup> ומהם שנים עשר מתלחמים עם כל בשר. *Dikduke Hateamim*, ed. Baer and Strack, page 4, line 22.

letters, in order to produce a language fit for use. Saadia himself did not agree with this number of 12, and said to ben Asher, "You should first familiarise yourself with the study of the alphabet."<sup>1</sup>

Saadia, like almost all those who succeeded him, accepted 11 formative or servile letters and 11 radicals, according to which the Hebrew alphabet was equally divided; but he was not satisfied with merely enumerating the letters of each of the two divisions; he came to the aid of the learner's memory by grouping those letters into words and sentences.

These newly introduced sentences of Saadia were approved and occasionally employed by succeeding grammarians, though for the most part in a different garb. It was just the very difficulty, inherent in the formation of intelligible and suitable sentences out of certain given letters, which enticed people to the invention of mnemonics, a task which the most eminent men, with few exceptions, accomplished with success. Some were influenced in their desire to invent new expressions, simply because they did not sufficiently understand, and consequently undervalued, the formulas of their predecessors. Self-conceit or the influence of friends and pupils was answerable for the introduction of new matter in this respect, with the unsatisfactory result that in part meaningless sentences were produced, and a string of words, loosely connected, was deemed sufficient for the purpose. At all events there arose, after the lead of Saadia, a considerable number of mnemonic formulæ, which clearly point to the great influence exercised by Saadia upon the later development of Jewish literature, even in its minutest details.

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<sup>1</sup> תָּלַף תָּלַף הָאוֹתוֹת (Dunasch, *Teshuboth against Saadia*, ed. Schröter, Breslau, 1866, p. 21, No. 72), which words Luzzato, in his *בית האוצר*, Lemberg, 1847, fol. 11b, takes up in defence of Dunasch, and punctuates and explains in the same way as they are given here. Cf. דקדוקי הטעמים of Aaron b. Asher, ed. Baer and Strack, *Introd.*, p. xi.

It was Joseph Kimchi who first grouped to a great extent the mnemonic formulæ up to date.<sup>1</sup>

A similar task was carried out by Profiat Duran<sup>2</sup> and the editors of his grammatical work, Dr. Jon. Friedlander and Jacob Cohen.<sup>3</sup> Harkavy<sup>4</sup> and Lebensohn<sup>5</sup> went further, and attempted for the first time an explanation of these mnemonics. After Bacher<sup>6</sup> had added somewhat to the understanding of the subject, Joseph Derenbourg of Paris—the Nestor of Jewish science—led the way of true interpretation by his elucidation of some of these mnemonic formulæ.<sup>7</sup> Bacher, Kaufmann, Porges and Grünwald<sup>8</sup> were fired by his example, whereupon Derenbourg<sup>9</sup> resumed the subject, and Harkavy, who was the first to start the movement, gained the further merit of collecting all the examples that had come to light and of undertaking a thorough discussion of their meaning.<sup>10</sup>

With all this the matter cannot be deemed concluded, nor the problem completely solved ; for most of the above-named scholars themselves declare some of their explanations as doubtful or inadequate.<sup>11</sup> The truth is that, in spite of our appreciation of the labour and skill evidenced in these attempts, we cannot even consider as settled many of these explanations which are put forth by their authors in all

<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his ספר זכרון, ed. Bacher, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> מעשה אפור, Vienna, 1865, ch. 13, p. 63, where the meaningless formula חפץ נוע סרק נרט cannot be attributed to Dunasch, inasmuch as he reckons ט and ט among the serviles, whilst no one includes נ among the radicals. We know, moreover, that the formula of Dunasch was quite different (*vide* No. III).

<sup>3</sup> מעשה אפור, p. 238, note.

<sup>4</sup> In חמניר, Vol. 21 (1877), pp. 181, 219, 287.

<sup>5</sup> חמניר, *ibid.*, pp. 237, 349.

<sup>6</sup> In his book *Abraham Ibn Ezra as a Grammarian*, Budapest, 1881, p. 57, notes 1 and 2, and p. 58, note 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Revue des Études Juives*, vol. XVI. (1887), p. 58 *sqq.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ib.*, p. 286 *sqq.*

<sup>9</sup> *Revue*, vol. XVII. (1888), p. 157, etc.

<sup>10</sup> In his latest book on Saadia, *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., Berlin, 1891, p. קכג, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Harkavy, *c.g.*, in his *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., p. קכב, line 8.

confidence and conviction. Under these circumstances the writer of this article determined to collect a series of explanations which for years past he had jotted down as elucidating several of these mnemonic expressions, and, as the way has once been paved towards something like completeness in the matter, to publish these attempts also, which, though they appear to him doubtful, may yet prove to be not beyond the range of possibility.

The subject itself may not be considered very important, but in matters of research, especially where philology is concerned, serious and untiring attention has to be paid to the small things as well as to the great, which is the case in every department of human activity when pursued in a conscientious spirit.

However little I may be inclined to claim for the explanations which I now submit that they are the best that can be adduced, I am yet sanguine that some of them will meet with the approval of experts, and perhaps bring about an ultimate settlement for the mnemonic formulæ in question.

Speaking generally, the question as to whether the inventors of these mnemonic phrases wished some meaning to be conveyed by them, has been decided in the affirmative by Derenbourg<sup>1</sup> and lastly by Harkavy.<sup>2</sup> This point can no longer be doubted, inasmuch as the sense of several of such combinations of letters has in reality been discovered.

The further question, as to whether we should seek and try to discover the sense fully connected with the author or his matter, is best determined by considering the success attended by such investigations. We might, at the outset, deem the lower order of grammarians capable of trivialities and commonplaces, finding, as we shall see in their case, that they employ a string of single words devoid of any meaning; but such an assump-

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<sup>1</sup> *Revue des Etudes Juives*, Vol. XVI., p. 57, etc.; Vol. XVII., p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., p. קכב.

tion would be out of the question in the case of such men as Saadia, Menachem, Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Ezra.

This latter assertion receives an apparent contradiction at the hands of two authorities by no means to be despised, viz., Ibn Ganah, who, to use his words, constructed new voces memoriales *for the first time* in such a manner that the two groups taken together gave a meaning,<sup>1</sup> and Joseph Kimchi, who expresses the opinion that his predecessors did not understand how to combine the radical letters into a proper phrase.<sup>2</sup> But, in reality, the contrary has clearly been established, viz., that these two grammarians could not have given sufficient attention to the mnemonic formulæ of their predecessors, or they would surely have observed that their own attempts were far behind those of their predecessors—a point which will be yet more fully brought out in the following remarks. We can, therefore, not resist the temptation, undeterred either by prejudice or by certain authorities, of discovering in those formulæ, where at all possible, a sense bearing some relation to the author or his works.

Wherever the attempt will be successful, it will be fully justified by the result; and where it will be unsuccessful or weak, it will prove that, in the case of important writers, a further and better solution must be awaited. It is only when we pursue a subject in such wise, that progress in understanding it and the advantageous co-operation of workers become possible.

But in this endeavour to understand the matter, we must take account of the natural limits in the laws of language and in the rules of taste. We dare not, as has been done, credit the better authors either with impossible

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<sup>1</sup> See the passage in Derenbourg's chief grammatical work (*Rev. des Et. Juiv.*, l.c.), supplemented from the original Arabic. The addition belongs to *Rikmah*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> ובאותיות השרש לא יכלו לחבר בהם ספר זכרון ed. Bacher, p. 3. סמנים נכונים במליצה.

constructions or want of correctness, or that they introduced Arabic words into these Hebrew sentences. In this respect we must again agree with Derenbourg,<sup>1</sup> especially as the question concerns such masters of the language as Menachem, Dunasch<sup>2</sup> and Ibn Gabirol, whom we could certainly not deem guilty of such want of taste and ability. It is different, however, in the case of certain later Hebrew, or even Aramaic, roots and forms,<sup>3</sup> to which people were accustomed in the ordinary written language, and which were permitted even in the grander style of the liturgical Piyutim.<sup>4</sup> Necessity justified moderate deviations of such a character from the purity of Biblical Hebrew. Similarly a *scriptio defectiva* was occasionally permissible<sup>5</sup> without offending the sense of friendly-disposed readers.<sup>6</sup>

To proceed to the individual writers, we must, as observed above, assign the first place in point of time and merit to Saadia.

## I.

Two different versions have come down to us as regards Saadia's mnemonic formulæ:—

1. The letters given in the mnemonic of Saadia as serviles are כה בשלום איתן, and זרע זרע, and טח ספר גזע זרע as radicals.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. XVII., p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Derenbourg has nevertheless assumed that the כטב of Dunasch stands for the verb כתב, since Dunasch could not write ת, as it did not belong to the radicals. Were this the case, Dunasch would be guilty of a childish orthographical error, which is far worse than the employment of an Arabic word.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.*, חט (below No. II.), טקם (No. VII.), אתכנה (Nos. XIV., XIX.), הכתיבן (No. XXIII.).

<sup>4</sup> Zunz, *Synagogale Poesie*, pp. 372-374.

<sup>5</sup> As has already been remarked by Harkavy in his *Life and Works of Saadia*, p. קכר.

<sup>6</sup> In spite of this sanction Dunash is severely called to task by the disciples of Menachem (תשובות תלמידי מנחם, ed. Stern, p. 40); but this was due to their not unwarranted anger against him.

<sup>7</sup> By Dunasch, in his תשובות על ר' סעדיה, ed. Schröter, p. 3.

The first three words by themselves cannot possibly form an independent sentence; they are clearly but the beginning of a complete sentence. Both of the above mnemonic clauses have, accordingly, to be read together and understood as one sentence. It would, therefore, read thus: **איתן בשלום כה טח ספר גזע צדק**. But what is the meaning of this sentence? **איתן**, as we know, is the poetical name by which Abraham is familiarly spoken of in the Liturgy, and is based on an Agadic interpretation contained in the Talmud.<sup>1</sup> **טח** is a Biblical word (root **טוח**) meaning to "plaster" a wall.<sup>2</sup> **טח ספר** can therefore mean "he glued a book," Menachem ben Saruk has for this: **חטספר**.<sup>3</sup> As a verb **חט**, with the meaning "to sew," or "stitch," is undoubtedly Aramaic; but the substantive root **חוט** "a thread," is Biblical Hebrew, with which are connected the later Hebrew **מוחט**, "a needle," and **חייט**, "a tailor." Thus **חט ספר**, according to Menachem, would mean, "He sewed together, bound a book." To paste together or bind was the last process a book underwent before it reached publication. **טח ספר** and **חט ספר** both therefore mean "He has given the finishing touch to a book," and since this final act was ascribed to the author, the two Hebrew expressions come to mean alike "He has composed a book." Though this extension of meaning is self-evident, it is confirmed beyond doubt by a striking example of a similar kind in the expression **הפבר**, that had come into use in the

<sup>1</sup> *Baba Batra*, 15a, **זה הוא אברהם** (Ps. lxxxix. 1), **אמר רב איתן האזרחי**. Abraham is therefore also called **אזרח** in the Piyut (e.g., in **אמנם כן**, by Jomtob ben Isaac).

<sup>2</sup> Lev. xiv. 42, etc.; Ezek. xiii. 10-12, 14, 15; 1 Chron. xxix. 4.

<sup>3</sup> According to the evidence of his contemporary, Dunasch, in his **תשובות על מנחם**, ed. Filipowski, London, 1855, pp. 8, 9; cf. Ibn Ganach in **ספר הרקמה**, p. 11; and Joseph Kimchi in **ספר זכרון**, p. 3 (where **נט** is written by mistake for **חט**), and **הגלוי**, ed. Matthews, p. 5. Accordingly, **טח ספר** in the *Machbereth*, ed. Filipowsky, p. 1a, must be an error, and is probably a wrong correction, according to Saadia. Harkavy is mistaken when, in *המניח*, 1877, p. 219, and in the *Life and Works of Saadia*, p. 12 and p. קכג, he refers back, even to Saadia, the variant **חט**.



Middle Ages to signify a "literary work or book," whilst the word itself signifies originally, "a volume," "leaves stitched together," corresponding to the Arabic *مِصْرَاع*, and thus, in the same connection, we get the word *מִצְרַעַר* for "the author of a book," from *חָצַר*, "he has composed," the etymological meaning being "he has sewn together,"—Arabic, *ضَرَفَ* IV. The foundation clause in Saadia's mnemonic formula *אִירָן מִטָּח סֵפֶר* would therefore mean "Abraham composed a book." But according to the meaning hitherto usually attached to the words *גֹּזַע צֶדֶק*, such a supposition could not arise. These words *גֹּזַע צֶדֶק* were taken as the subject to *סֵפֶר*,<sup>1</sup> either in the meaning of "the righteous stem," *i.e.*, Israel, or, in the partitive sense, "one of the righteous stem," *i.e.*, an Israelite. Naturally *אִירָן* could not be admitted side by side with this subject as an additional subject to *סֵפֶר מִטָּח*.

In reality, the clue to this formula of Saadia lies in the proper understanding of the words *גֹּזַע צֶדֶק*. The true and simple meaning presents itself without straining when we observe that *גֹּזַע* "stem" is used in Isaiah xi. 1, as parallel to *שְׂרָשִׁים* "roots," and could therefore be used in the same way as *שְׂרָשִׁים*, which is applied in language to the roots of words, just as in modern languages "stem" and "root" are synonymous; *צֶדֶק*, however, does not mean in this connection "righteousness," or "piety," but "that which is right and true."<sup>2</sup>

*סֵפֶר גֹּזַע צֶדֶק* would, accordingly, mean "a book on the right stems or roots in the language." The lost *Agron* of Saadia was just such a book, in the Hebrew introduction to which he propounds the division of the sounds of the Hebrew language into two equal classes, and which

<sup>1</sup> Derenbourg (*Revue*, Vol. XVI., p. 59, N. 3) considered *מִטָּח* as an error for *חָט*, which he explains = *חָטָא*, but Harkavy (*הַמְנִיד*, 1877, p. 287) regards it as an Arabic word.

<sup>2</sup> As in Leviticus xix. 36; Isa. xlv. 19; Ps. lii. 15. A meaning which, as is known, is most general for this root *צֶדֶק* in Arabic, and consequently nearer to the minds of Saadia and Menachem, than to the minds of the non-Jewish grammarians and to our own.

contained in the very passage at which it abruptly breaks off the complete mnemonic formulæ which we are considering, and which was preserved and handed down to us by Dunasch.

We now understand, too, the force of the word כה in this formula. כה טה ספר גזע צדק means: "Thus (in the same manner as I composed the *Agron*) "did Abraham compose a book on the true roots." But to what book of Abraham is reference here made? To none other than to *Sefer Jezirah* (the book on the formation of the world), which has been furnished by Saadia with an Arabic commentary. In one passage of that book the Patriarch Abraham is distinctly mentioned,<sup>1</sup> and for this reason Abraham was from early times regarded as the author of the book—a belief which was shared even by Saadia.<sup>2</sup>

This book has for its object, among other things, the explanation of the formation of the world out of the simplest elements, out of the elementary numbers 1 to 10, and out of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. With the help of mathematical combinations it is shown, that few letters suffice to form a large number of different, and partly contradictory, words and notions;<sup>3</sup> that, accordingly, the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet indicate a group of letters not very numerous, to which we may trace the roots of all names which designate existing things.<sup>4</sup> As examples of words denoting different and opposite ideas and formed out of one and the same set of letters, the book mentions אמש, אמש, משא, שמש,<sup>5</sup> and ענג by the side of נגע.<sup>6</sup> We, therefore, already recognise in this book a similar theory started regarding the roots of the language as was afterwards developed by Saadia in the *Agron*, by Menachem in his *Machbereth*, and by others; so that, while these authors, by

<sup>1</sup> ספר יצירה, VI. 4.

<sup>2</sup> As appears from a certain passage in his commentary. Cf. Jehudah Barceloni's יצירה ס' פירוש, ed. Halberstam, Berlin, 1885, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> ס' יצירה, II. 4; IV. 4.

<sup>4</sup> ס' יצירה, II. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.*, III. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.*, II. 4.

means of their root-books, furthered the science of language, the *Sefer Jezirah*—containing as it did the germs of a similar theory—set itself the task of teaching the science of cosmogony, which attempted to derive the abundance and plurality of existing things in the world from the various combinations of a no large number of letters.

The *Sefer Jezirah* was thus regarded as a kind of philosophical root-book of the Hebrew language; it aimed at proving that the true roots of this copious language were able to convey the ideas of the varied real existing objects. So far then, according to Saadia, did Abraham compose a book on the true roots of the language.

After what we have said, Saadia's mnemonic formula is perfectly clear, with the exception of the word בשלום, which needs some further elucidation. We have the choice of two explanations: either בשלום has to be taken with איתן as an elliptical expression (justified by necessity) for "Abraham who resteth in peace," or בשלום has to be connected with מטה ספר גזע צדק, and points to the *harmonious co-operation* of single letters, unrelated to each other, for the purpose of forming significant and proper roots.<sup>1</sup>

The whole mnemonic formula of Saadia, consisting, as it does, of two parts, איתן בשלום כה מטה ספר גזע צדק, would then mean either: "Abraham, who rests in peace, composed in the same manner (as Saadia in his *Agron*) a book on the proper roots," or, "Abraham has in the same manner composed a book on the proper roots formed by the harmonious union (of letters) of the language."

We may, perhaps, assume that in the undetermined expression בשלום, it was intended to hint at both these meanings.

## 2. At the end of the part which has been preserved to

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<sup>1</sup> Note the rule of Saadia referred to in Harkavy's *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., p. D, according to which combinations like דם, זע, צש, קב, קנ do not occur in the roots of the language, just on account of their relationship in sound.

us of Saadia's Hebrew Introduction to his *Agron*,<sup>1</sup> two sets of letters are found in succession as indicating the serviles, each of which, taken separately, is meaningless, but taken together give a meaning. The second clause contains the same words, only in different order, as in the formula we have discussed above, and has the same signification. But it is the formula as a whole, namely, **האובים כשתלן בשלום**, **כה איתן**, which still awaits a satisfactory explanation. According to Derenbourg,<sup>2</sup> the first two words have scarcely any meaning. Two explanations have, nevertheless, been offered: according to one **האובים כשתלן** means "the branches resemble the root,"<sup>3</sup> according to the other, these words mean: "When he, Abraham, planted the tamarisks" (referring to Gen. xxi. 33).<sup>4</sup> But, apart from other considerations, the word **האובים** can denote neither branches nor trees, the Hebrew equivalent for these being, according to Job viii. 12, and Song of Songs vi. 11, **אֵפִים**, but never **אובים**. Nor can we in this connection seriously entertain the proof adduced by Harkavy in support of his explanation, which he derives from certain poetical expressions used by Saadia and the authors of the Piyut, and we are scarcely justified in attributing such errors of language to Saadia. It would, perhaps, be reasonable to take the incomprehensible word **כשתלן** as a hybrid irregularly formed out of two words, and the sentence would therefore read **האובים כשתלן בשלום כה איתן**, meaning: "Abraham went to rest in peace in the same way as he set down those willing ones" (*i.e.*, those single letters which willingly yielded to him), so that they—joined in peaceful unity—might form the radicals of the language—**האובים**, "the willing ones" (from **אבה**, to be willing), reminds us at the same time onomatopoeically of the **א"ב** (the Hebrew alphabet), which this word is intended to denote.

<sup>1</sup> Harkavy, *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., 12, l. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue*, vol. XVI. p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Revue*, l.c., p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> Harkavy, l.c. 4.

## II.

Menachem Ibn Saruk<sup>1</sup> gives for the radical letters Saadia's mnemonic **זע צדק ספר גזע**, the only difference being that he puts **זע** for **זע**.<sup>2</sup> For the serviles he invents the words **שמלאכרו בינה**. According to the interpretation above, the whole of it, as one sentence, offers no difficulty, viz., **זע ספר גזע צדק שמלאכרו בינה** "A man composed a book concerning the true roots, whose work is one of understanding,"—no immodest designation for Menachem, the author of the *Machbereth*.

We have further to remark that the emendation of **זע** in the formula of Saadia into **זע**, was a real *improvement*, owing to which Menachem has just claim to originality. It is only in this way that we can account for the fact that Dunasch, who was ever on the watch to attack every weak point of Menachem, and who was well acquainted with Saadia's formula, did not accuse him of plagiarising Saadia's formula.

The points of improvement were, first, that Menachem by the word **זע** arrayed the letters **ז**, **ע** in their alphabetical order, whereas Saadia thought that there was no alternative but to invert them: and, secondly, that *the sewing together* (**זע**) of the leaves of the book corresponds better to the current Arabic expression **צדקה**, IV., than *the plastering* (**זע**).

## III.

Dunasch Ibn Labrat invents two formulæ for the serviles (which he had increased by the addition of the letters **ד** and **ט**), and only one formula for the remaining radical letters.

1. He has for the serviles **דנש חליי אמת כטב**, and for the radicals **עז ספר קץ**.<sup>3</sup> It has already been pointed out

<sup>1</sup> In the *Machbereth*, ed. Filipowski, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> As was shown above, p. 481.

<sup>3</sup> **תשובות על מנחם**, ed. Filipowski, p. 5.

that כַּטֵּב can scarcely be an Arabic word, or even an orthographical error of the worst kind, sanctioned by necessity alone.<sup>1</sup> In connection with the only Hebrew form possible כַּטֵּב, we must here assume a *scriptio defectiva*—as is the habit with דָּנָשׁ, and understand after כַּטֵּב some such words as דָּנָשׁ הַלֵּוִי אִמְתָּ כַּטֵּב חָג קָץ, בעֵינֵי בְנֵי אָדָם. Accordingly, דָּנָשׁ הַלֵּוִי אִמְתָּ כַּטֵּב חָג קָץ, would mean, “Dunasch the Levite, since truth finds favour, has celebrated a festival in honour of the (poor) ending of the audacious book” (1 Sam. xxx. 16; Ps. xlii. 5), *i.e.*, that Dunasch had, by his convincing critique of Menachem’s *Machbereth*—a work launched forth by its author with such audacity—rendered the work itself innoxious.

2. The second combination of the servile letters is given by Dunasch in his book against Saadia.<sup>2</sup> Joined to the mnemonic for the radical letters, the sentence stands thus: דָּנָשׁ הַלֵּוִי אִמְתָּ כַּטֵּב חָג קָץ, meaning: “Adoniah,<sup>3</sup> who possesses valuable jewels (in the convincing truth of his triumphant Teshuboth) has (endowed with these jewels) celebrated a feast in honour of the ending of an audacious book.” In these words Dunasch boldly expresses the belief that he had, by means of his criticism, also destroyed the value of Saadia’s Biblical work or of his *Agron*.

#### IV.

The embittered disciples of Menachem took their revenge upon Dunasch for his scorn and want of consideration for their master by sneeringly changing the formula employed by Dunasch into דָּנָשׁ הַלֵּוִי מִמָּה כָּתַב,<sup>4</sup> “Dunasch the Levite has written indecent things.”

<sup>1</sup> Above p. 480 and n. 4 *ib.*

<sup>2</sup> תשובות על ר' סעדיה גאון, ed. Schröter, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> A Biblical name (1 Kings i. 5), sounding like Dunasch (*Fr.-Latin Donatus*), on which account he usually calls himself אֲדוֹנִיָּים, owing simply to the similarity of sound (Isaiah xix. 4; xxvi. 3 [not as a proper name]).

<sup>4</sup> תשובות תלמידי מנחם, ed. Stern, p. 41.

## V.

The formula for the radical letters composed by Jehudi ben Sheshet,<sup>1</sup> a disciple of Dunasch, in contempt of Isaac b. Kapron, a disciple of Menachem, is scarcely more refreshing, עז קר חפץ סג, "The chilly goat (the dull Ben Kapron—a play upon his name) is willingly gone wrong."<sup>2</sup>

## VI.

Ali ben Suleiman, the Karaite, in his abridged form of the *Agron* of the Karaite David ben Abraham Alfasi, gives us for the radicals his formula, מפסר זעק גר צח, and for the serviles ואביכן התל שם.<sup>3</sup> If we take these two together, the meaning would be: "The leader (Jer. li. 27; Nah. iii. 17; Moses, the servant of God is here meant) proclaimed the fountain of a pure language (inasmuch as the words of Revelation were types of a noble form of language): but your father (your teacher Saadia—for this expression cf. Gen. iv. 20, 21; xlv. 8; 2 Kings ii. 12) has there (in his linguistic work, the *Agron*) been guilty of fraud." We must bear in mind that it is a Karaite and a rival of Saadia's who is speaking, and who is endeavouring to supplant Saadia's *Agron* by substituting his own work. ואביכן, with an Aramaic ending, is in this case justified by necessity. It may be that the word ואביכן by its sound, further hints *en passant* at the *Agron*, a work arranged according to the alphabet (א"ב), in the same way as the *Lexicon* of Machir ben Jehudah, brother of the famous Rabbi Gershon in Mayence, was called א"ב דרבי מכיר.<sup>4</sup> The words ואביכן התל שם (according to Gen. xxxi. 7) would thus have this

<sup>1</sup> תשובות יהודי אבן ששט, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> The passage in Pinsker's קרמוניות לקוטי, p. 160, in connection with this subject, is worth reading.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. קפח in the Arabic text, and p. קצח in the Hebrew translation.

<sup>4</sup> Rashi to בטנים, Gen. xliii. 11.

additional meaning, "And your alphabetical work there (the *Agron* of Saadia which is in vogue among you) has practised fraud."

## VII.

Abulwalid Ibn Ganach (R. Jonah) was influenced by his young admirers to set up new formulæ, which should possess this advantage over former ones, that both parts taken together should express some definite meaning.<sup>1</sup> But it is evident that this otherwise illustrious philosopher did not take sufficient trouble to understand the signs invented by his predecessors;<sup>2</sup> and, moreover, composed a mnemonic formula barely intelligible and certainly not elegant. We will not say that learned men have been wanting in attempts at explanation, for we may mention Derenbourg,<sup>3</sup> Kaufmann,<sup>4</sup> Brüll,<sup>5</sup> and Harkavy.<sup>6</sup> But, apart from other considerations, which have already been partially inquired into,<sup>7</sup> there is lacking in the case of most of these explanations a direct reference to the subject-matter itself or to the author. I would, therefore, propose an interpretation of these words which at least possesses the merit of not denying to the formula of a man like Ibn Ganach that very reference which we should suppose his words to contain. The meaning of the whole sentence is perhaps as follows:—  
 קְבֹהּ עַל גִּדְּוֹתַי אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּה, "O edifice [really : erection, *τάξις*] (of this my work on language), strong in fortune (in the success of my present undertaking), free from attack (which offers no chance of attack to the

<sup>1</sup> Derenbourg in *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. XVI., p. 57, etc.

<sup>2</sup> As has already been remarked above, p. 479.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual* I., p. 226.

<sup>6</sup> *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., p. קכה.

<sup>7</sup> *Vide* Harkavy *ib.*, where the objection raised against Kaufmann, that he does not explain קְבֹהּ, rests upon an error, since Kaufmann and Derenbourg read and explain עֲוֹנִי as one word. Kaufmann's explanation is very pleasing, only נֶאֱמַר cannot = נֶאֱמַר, and he does not explain אֶת.

<sup>8</sup> *Rikmah*, p. 12.



enemy)! Build up my welfare also (prepare for me neither enmity nor suffering)." טקם is a later Hebrew and Aramaic word of foreign origin, occurring also in the form טכסיס; גדל עז and גדל צר are each of them expressions standing in the construct relation, which is frequently the case with adjectives, *e.g.*, גדל כח (Nahum i. 3), גדל העצה ורב, גדל העלילה (Jer. xxxii. 19), נקי כפים ובר לבב, (Ps. xxiv. 4).

## VIII.

Salomon Ibn Gabirol includes the two classes of letters in the one sentence, קט צה גזע ספרד | קט שלמה כתוב.<sup>1</sup> The latter portion, requiring as it does some explanation, found an early interpreter in Salomon Parchon (1161), who gave it the following meaning: "The little one, of Spanish extraction, who understands how to express himself clearly."<sup>2</sup> Although most of the newer explanations repose more or less upon this older one, yet the latter is hardly correct, if only because קט, as has been well remarked by Bacher,<sup>3</sup> has the meaning, according to Ezek. xvi. 47, not of קטן, "small" or "young," but of "not much." The attempt to explain קט as an Arabic word, is scarcely worth entertaining in the case of a master of the language such as Ibn Gabirol. The word, in truth, occurs as a pure Biblical verb in Psalm xcv. 10, viz., אקוט בדור, "I was displeased with this generation."

The whole of the above-named sentence would accordingly mean: "I, Salomon, write (doing my best to teach the grammar and beauties of the Hebrew language), but the Spanish stock is little inclined to pure Hebrew." It breathes the same lament concerning ignorance and neglect of the Hebrew language among his Jewish countrymen, to

<sup>1</sup> In his grammatical poem ענק, V. 80, 81.

<sup>2</sup> מחברת הערוך, קטן מדבר צחות מבני ספרד, ed. Sal. Stern, p. xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Revue*, vol. XVI., p. 286.

which Ibn Gabirol distinctly gives expression in the same poem<sup>1</sup> in which the formula in question occurs.

## IX.

The sign used by Isaac Levi to designate the serviles, viz., *נבואת המשכיל*,<sup>2</sup> would, according to my idea, imply his high admiration for the power of perception which is able to distinguish between the servile and radical letters, constituting, as this power does, *a prophetic insight on the part of the thinker*, i.e., an inspiration bordering upon prophecy, which in this instance falls to the lot of, not a prophet, but a man of science.

The inventor of the formula must have been thinking either of Saadia or Menachem.

## X.

Abraham b. Kambil (Ibn Kamnial) endeavoured to express similar admiration in a different way, *הוכן שביל אמת*,<sup>3</sup> "A part of truth has been prepared," i.e., the distinction between the two kinds of letters is a discovery that paves the only possible way for the progress of grammatical and lexicographical investigations.

## XI.

The mnemonic sentences of Menachem b. Salomon, who follows Dunasch in respect of the letters *ד* and *ט*, are *חג עז* and *דמש מלאכת בינה* and *ספר קץ*. If these expressions have been handed down in a correct form, then they are, as Harkavy<sup>4</sup> well remarks, an unskilful adoption of the mne-

<sup>1</sup> ענק, V. 5-15, 46-54.

<sup>2</sup> ספר זכרון of Joseph Kimchi, ed. Bacher, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> According to the ספר זכרון, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Works of Saadia*, I., p. קכו.

monics of Menachem and Dunasch, being a string of words which make no sentence whatever, and are quite meaningless.

## XII.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) invented three new mnemonic formulæ for the serviles and one for the radicals. The latter one has either been considered as unintelligible, or has been explained in a manner hardly satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> The other apparently intelligible formulæ seem also to require a brighter interpretation than they have in reality received.

1. For the servile letters Ibn Ezra gives, first, the words *שִׁית לְךָ אֶב הַמוֹן*,<sup>2</sup> the meaning of which is, perhaps, "make unto thyself the alphabet (א"ב) as a servile troop" (Judges iv. 7; 1 Sam. xiv. 16)—a relation in which this half of the alphabet has actually to stand to the other half, that of the radicals. At the same time the expression *אֶב הַמוֹן* (according to Gen. xvii. 4), is a play upon the name of the author, Abraham.<sup>3</sup>

For the radicals Ibn Ezra gives *בֹּט חֶסֶד קֶצֶר זַעַף*,<sup>4</sup> words which, in my opinion, have reference to the author himself, and would add to our very scanty knowledge of the social relations in the life of Ibn Ezra. I translate the words literally: "A divorce in kindness cuts anger short." According to this expression we would learn that Ibn Ezra had, on account of intolerable dissensions, divorced his wife. We could thus the more easily understand how it is, that in his many writings, and especially in his two lamentations upon the conversion of his son Isaac to Islamism,<sup>5</sup> Ibn Ezra makes no mention whatever, not even by a single word, of

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Words of Saadia.*

<sup>2</sup> *מאזנים*, ed. Heydenheim, fol. 3a.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Gabirol in his *עֵנֶק*, V. 42, uses *אֶב הַמוֹן* as the poetical name for the patriarch Abraham.

<sup>4</sup> *מאזנים*, *in loco*, and *שִׁפָּה בְּרוּרָה*, ed. Lippmann, fol. 31a.

<sup>5</sup> *Vide my Rhymes and Poems of Abraham Ibn Ezra*, I., pp. 84-86.

his wife, either as living or as dead. Might we not further recognise in the "fury of his oppressors," which drove him from Spain into a distant land,<sup>1</sup> these very domestic differences and the troubles resulting from this unhappy marriage?

In this way we can explain these separate clauses, mentioned above, as independent one of the other, each affording a distinct meaning. But if the author, as is possibly the case, intended that these two clauses be read together, we should have to regard the whole sentence as one in which Ibn Ezra once had given himself moral support amid his domestic trials. He addresses himself thus: שֵׁית לְךָ אֵב הַמּוֹן גַּם חֶסֶד קֶצֶר זַעַף, "Set down for thyself (to be used at the proper time), O Abraham, a divorce in kindness, which has put an end to anger" (in the case of many other unhappy marriages).

2. In another passage<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ezra uses for the radicals the formula introduced by Ibn Gabirol, קַט צִח גּוֹע סִפֵּר, the meaning of which we explained above.<sup>3</sup> For the serviles he invented the words כֶּשֶׁרִיל אֵב הַמּוֹן,<sup>4</sup> "like the plant of Abraham" (Ps. cxxviii. 3; Gen. xvii. 4), meaning: Just as Ishmael, who was freeborn on his father's side, but a slave on the side of Hagar, his mother (בֶּן הָאֵמָה, Gen. xxi. 13), so these eleven letters are sometimes radical, and thus form the central and governing part of the word, but at other times are merely subservient to the other letters, and serve only to give a finish to the roots of words.<sup>5</sup>

3. Ibn Ezra has a third formula for the servile letters, אֹת מִבֵּין הַשֶּׁכֶּל,<sup>6</sup> "A sign of one who understands discern-

<sup>1</sup> הוציאתי מארץ ספרד חמת המציקים, l.c. p. 19, l. 14. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17, l. 10, which, however, can only refer to troubles as regards the means of livelihood in a foreign land.

<sup>2</sup> *Zachot*, ed. Lippmann, fol. 14b.

<sup>3</sup> P. 490.

<sup>4</sup> *Zachot*, l.l.; *Jesod Mora*, XI. init.; *Safah Berurah*, 31a.

<sup>5</sup> פעם עקרים ופעם, *Jesod Mora*, XI. init.; פעם שרשים ופעם משרתים, *Zach.* 14b.

<sup>6</sup> *Jes. Mor.*, XI. init., where the word אֵן is omitted before אֹת in Stern's edition.

ment," implying that the discovery of the distinction between these letters and the radicals evidences the spirit of a man of keen intellect and of a deep thinker.<sup>1</sup>

4. In his latest grammatical work,<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ezra simply transposed the two clauses which went to form the formula occurring in his earlier writings. For the servile letters he has כשרתיל אב המון,<sup>3</sup> and for the radicals גט חסד קצר זעף.<sup>4</sup> As we have seen, each of these taken separately makes good sense, and this may be the correct solution. But if Ibn Ezra (as Saadia and Menachem were wont) intended that, in this instance, these two expressions should be connected into one sentence, they might bear this meaning: "A divorce given in kindness cuts anger short, as was once the case with Ishmael"—at the time when the dismissal of Hagar and her son put an end to dissensions in the house of Abraham (Gen. xxi. 10, etc.). Even according to this explanation the formula for the radical letters still preserves its original reference to Ibn Ezra, its author.

### XIII.

Judah Hadassi, in his chief work,<sup>5</sup> published on the 25th of Tishri, 1148, gives for the serviles the words לאיתן מושכבה, a clause capable at least of some interpretation. But the alternative combination of these same letters, יה שמו הכן בלא, which he adds in that book, defies all attempt at explanation, and justifies the assumption that, as regards this author, he gives a combination of Hebrew words, without intending that they should be connected so as to bear any definite meaning.

The inferiority of the Karaites manifests itself in small well as in great matters.

For the radical letters Judah makes use of Menachem's

<sup>1</sup> The meaning is similar to that of *Mnemonic* in IX. and X.

<sup>2</sup> *Safah Berurah*, 31a.

<sup>3</sup> Above, No. II.

<sup>4</sup> Above, No. I.

<sup>5</sup> *אשכול הכפר*, ed. Goslov, fol. 62a, col. 2.

formula,<sup>1</sup> though, without obvious reason, he inverts the order of the words into *ספר גוע צדק דמ*. It is, indeed, doubtful whether this author correctly understood the meaning of these words, when one considers that no attempt in this case is made to determine approximately the subject to *דמ*, whilst Menachem found it necessary to determine the subject by means of a relative clause.<sup>2</sup>

#### XIV.

Joseph Kimchi has<sup>3</sup> for the serviles *בו ארונה משלי*, and for the radicals *צד עט קח בור סף*. These two groups have, perhaps, also to be connected into one sentence, and the former punctuated according to Derenbourg,<sup>4</sup> though with a different meaning. The sentence, in its entirety, would read thus: *אֲרֹנָה מִשְׁלִי בּוֹ • צֵד עֵט קָח בּוֹר סָף*, and might represent a conundrum on the author's name *יוסף*. We should accordingly translate: "In it (in this mnemonic formula) by that which is mine (by a part of my name) I am styled (since *י* the first part of *יוסף* occurs as the final letters of the serviles *משלי* and *בו*); do thou, O huntsman (Gen. xxvii. 33), wishing (1 Sam. xv. 19) for the solution of my riddle! take for the (2nd) part (Gen. xv. 17) of my name a basin (Exod. xii. 22) or a threshold" (Judges xix. 27)—*סף* have these meanings in Hebrew.

The letters *י* among the serviles and *ס* among the radicals form the two parts (*גזרים*) of the name *יוסף*.

#### XV.

Moses Kimchi, son of the former, made use of his father's mnemonic for the serviles (No. XIV.), and of Menachem's for

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> *שמלאכתו בינה* (above, II., p. 486).

<sup>3</sup> *זכרון*, ed. Bacher, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Revue*, vol. XVI., p. 60. Cf. XIX. below, where the pronunciation of the verb is given, *vide* Note, *ibid.*

the radicals (No. II.).<sup>1</sup> But he also composed an independent formula for the serviles, viz., *משה כתב אלינו*.<sup>2</sup> The meaning would, I suppose, be: "Moses (the prophet) wrote for and delivered to us (*sc.*, the Book of the Law);" having, at the same time, the secondary meaning: "The author *Moses* Kimchi has delivered to us, his readers, the work which he has written." Out of the radicals Moses Kimchi<sup>3</sup> constructed the sentence *רָקַז קָמַף עַץ חַסֵּד*, which has already been rendered by Bacher,<sup>4</sup> "Anger snapped asunder the tree of kindness." We cannot gather any more distinct reference from this sentence; in the case of this author it is, perhaps, unnecessary to presuppose any further revelation.

## XVI.

Moses b. Isaac, of England, the author of *ספר השחם*, borrowing from the formula introduced by Saadia, constructed<sup>5</sup> the following connected sentence, comprising both classes of letters: *ספר גזע צדק טח כותל אבני שחם*: *i.e.*, "A book concerning the true roots, he (the author of this work) composed—a very wall of onyx (schoam) stones." The author brings into prominence that numerically or by transposition *שחם* is identical with *משה*—his own name; and the latter phrase is, therefore, equivalent to "a wall of Mosche-stones." That the word "wall" has to be taken in apposition to *ספר*, is placed beyond doubt by the use of the verb *טח* (according to Lev. xiv. 42, 43).

## XVII.

The anonymous author of the Appendix to Judah Ibn

<sup>1</sup> מהלך שבילי הדעת, ed. Mantua, fol. 4 (unpaged).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by David Kimchi (רד"ק) in *Michlol*, ed. Ven., fol. 13a, col. 2 and by Profiat Duran (Efodi) in *מעשה אפור*, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> In his Commentary to Ezra, I. 1, which, in the *מוקראות גדולות*, is wrongly printed under the name of Ibn Ezra.

<sup>4</sup> *Revue*, vol. XVI., p. 288. Cf. Harkavy, *Life and Works of Saadia*, p. 30.  
<sup>5</sup> *השחם*, ed. Collins, p. 5.

Balam's *מַעְמֵי הַמִּקְרָא*, has for the serviles *בֶּן הַיּוֹשֵׁת*,<sup>1</sup> which probably contains a reference to some person and event connected with the history of the author: "Michael has been appointed (or, according to Gen. iv. 25, presented) as son."

It was evidently the intention to raise in the words of this formula a lasting memorial to the real or adopted son of the author, or the son of a near family connection, named Michael.

Out of the radical letters he constructed the sentence: *בּוֹזַע צֶדֶק רַפְּסָהּ*, "The true roots which one had trampled down, hath he joined."

This is a free adaptation of the formula of Menachem.<sup>2</sup>

## XVIII.

David b. Salomo Ibn Jachja combined the serviles<sup>3</sup> into the sentence, *כְּתָבִי שָׁלֵם וְנָאֵה*, "My book is complete and admirable."

## XIX.

Abraham de Balmes (died 1522) constructed out of the serviles the words *וְבַלְמֵשִׁי אֶתְפַּקֶּה*,<sup>4</sup> "De Balmes I am surnamed."

## XX.

Elias Levita (1469-1549) forms the serviles into the expression *שֵׁם אֵלִיהוּ נִכְתָּב*,<sup>5</sup> "The name of Elias occurs already in Holy Writ."

<sup>1</sup> *מַעְמֵי הַמִּקְרָא*, ed. Paris, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Above, No. II.

<sup>3</sup> *לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים*, the beginning.

<sup>4</sup> *מִקְנֵה אֲבֵרָם*, Ven., 1523, fol. 5b of the Hebrew (unpaged). The pronunciation "balmesi ethcane" is also distinctly given in the Latin translation to that book.

<sup>5</sup> Notes to the *מִזְהָר* of Moses Kimchi, ed. Mantua, fol. 4b, and to the *מַכְלוּל* of David Kimchi, ed. Ven., fol. 13a, col. 2.



## XXI.

Immanuel ben Jekuthiel Benevento has<sup>1</sup> for the formative letters the formula מנואל, "היש בכת מנואל", "Is there in the class another Manuel" (a namesake of mine)? Through the clever omission of the radical letter ע from the beginning of his Hebrew name—the insertion of which among the formative letters would have been out of place—the author gets the name Manuel, the form current in his own country.

For the radicals he makes use of Ibn Ezra's formula, גט חסד קצר זעף.<sup>2</sup>

## XXII.

Moses Provinciale<sup>3</sup> used for the serviles the formula of Moses Kimchi,<sup>4</sup> משה כרב אלינו, and out of the radicals he constructed: גט פָּרֵץ עֵזֶק, "חסד", "A kindness is the divorce which has put a fence to the breach" (Isaiah v. 2, according to Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Kimchi), i.e., which has put an end to the continual strife and discord arising from an unfortunate union. The meaning of this formula is similar to that conveyed by the expression employed by Abraham Ibn Ezra<sup>5</sup>; and unless it be wholly an imitation of the latter, it may refer to the author himself or to some person nearly related to him.

## XXIII.

Samuel Archevolte (died 1611) gives,<sup>6</sup> side by side with Menachem's formula for the radical letters, an original formula for the serviles, שמואל הכתיבן, "Samuel (Archevolte) caused these letters (comprehended in this mnemonic) to be written down." The Hiphil of כתב is post-biblical.

<sup>1</sup> לוית הן, ed. Mantua, fol. 7a.

<sup>2</sup> Above, XII. 1.

<sup>3</sup> In בשם קרמון, Ven., 1597, fol. 3a.

<sup>4</sup> Above, XV.

<sup>5</sup> Above, XII.

<sup>6</sup> ערונת הבשם, Amsterdam, 1713, fol. 4a.

XXIV.

Salomon De Oliveira (d. 1708) constructed<sup>1</sup> for the two classes of letters the one formula: **יִכְתּוּב נָא שְׁלֵמָה . גּוֹעַ**. **בְּיָד קָרֵחַ צָדֵק**, "Let Salomon (the author) write comforted; the stock of young children has injured the truth"—a lament upon the ignorance of Hebrew grammar among the youth of his time.

He further invented, as a separate formula for the serviles, the well-known names, **אֵיתָן מֹשֶׁה וְכָלֵב**.

XXV.

Salomon Hanau (d. 1746), by transforming somewhat the old formula of Menachem, obtained for the radicals, **דָּס** **פֶּרֶשׁ גּוֹעַ צָדֵק**,<sup>3</sup> "He (God) had pity upon the gleanings of the righteous stem," viz., Israel. Thus this author no longer took the words **גּוֹעַ צָדֵק** in the same sense as they had most probably (according to what we stated above) been taken by Saadia and Menachem.

For the serviles he gives **אֵיתָן מֹשֶׁה וְכָלֵב**, according to Salomon de Oliveira, but without naming him as the author of this ingenious combination. If, however, we leave out of account his silence on this point, which certainly was scarcely proper on his part, it must be acknowledged that Salomon Hanau was the one who caused this mnemonic to be circulated, inasmuch as the work of Solomon de Oliveira, if only on account of its language, appealed but to a small circle of readers. As **אֵיתָן** was the current name for Abraham in the poetical portions of the Liturgy, this group represented three Biblical names, easily

<sup>1</sup> In his grammatical treatise **יֵד לְשׁוֹן** (Spanish), Amst., 1689, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Harkavy, *l.c.*, p. קל, quotes **גּוֹעַ כֶּף סָרַח צָדֵק**, according to Porges, with the printer's error in the *Revue*, XVI., p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> **יִסּוּד הַנִּיקּוּד**, Amst. 1730, fol. 3a.

impressed upon the memory, and the formula was, on this account, adopted by preference at the hands of later writers.

We may well pass over at this point whatever else is known in connection with mnemonic formulæ for the two classes of letters—the latest modern attempts in particular, since the authors have themselves added explanations to the mnemonics.<sup>1</sup>

From the foregoing statements it will be seen, that ample justice has been done in the past to the subject under consideration on the part of various authors. But we have to observe, in the first place, that it was the old classical writers of Hebrew literature, Saadia, Menachem, Ibn Gabirol, Abraham Ibn Ezra and others, who, by virtue of their reputation and deserts, attracted the attention of posterity to the formulæ which they introduced; and, secondly, that it was the very obscurity of these mnemonics which was a never-ending source of fascination, prompting, as they did, to divers attempts at solving their proper meaning—a meaning such as their inventors intended them to convey. These attempts have accordingly continued to the most recent times; and it is reserved for competent critics to determine how far the explanations we have suggested in this essay, are correct.

One noteworthy fact must, however, be brought out on a comparison of the various explanations given, viz., that, in small and insignificant as well as in great and important matters, an intellectual movement, once started, goes forward on the road of progress until it reaches its highest point of development, at which it again, by degrees, becomes weaker and less independent, so that its creative power seems exhausted and gone. This general statement does not exclude the possibility that subsequent attempts may, in isolated instances, be successful in galvanising and quickening the movement.

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<sup>1</sup> What is here omitted may be found in *Harkavy's Life and Works of Saadia*, I., pp. ໒໑ and ໒໒.

We have noticed how the mnemonic formulæ for the radical and servile letters, invented and introduced by the earlier masters, were made use of, imitated and transformed, seldom, however, improved, by later writers.

Not all of those authors of mnemonic signs named above were even aware that Saadia was the first to introduce, and so popularise these signs that they appeared to be an indispensable addition to every Hebrew grammar. It has been our task, in adducing the investigations made on the subject by the latest savants, to assign to Saadia his proper place in even this comparatively unimportant point, and in this connection to recall the memory of the great man who lived just about a thousand years ago.

DAVID ROSIN.

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